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ABSTRACT

This booklet explores the experience of being a new leader in an infant/family program, focusing on reflective leadership--using self-awareness, observation, and flexible responses as tools to manage stress and increase on-the-job effectiveness. Section one defines reflective leadership and explores the parallel process of leadership. Section two outlines the competencies required for effective leadership. A number of leadership issues are discussed, including how to individualize one's relationships with staff members, encourage collegial work, and learn from conflict. Section three provides interactive group exercises. Two appendices include a staff development questionnaire and a self-assessment of leadership style. (Contains 16 references and a list of 14 related Web sites.) (EV)

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Being in Charge:

Reflective Leadership in
Infant/Family Programs

The ZERO TO THREE Center for Program Excellence

by Rebecca Parlakian and Nancy L. Seibel, M.Ed., NCC

Resources for Program Leaders

PS 030491

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Washington, D.C.

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BEING IN CHARGE:

REFLECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN INFANT/FAMILY PROGRAMS

Michelle looked up from washing her hands and caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Newly promoted to coordinator of her infant/toddler health initiative, she stopped for a moment, surprised by the self-assured woman she saw reflected back at her. "Wow, is this how I look to the rest of the world? How is it that I seem so confident when what I'm really thinking is 'How did I get here anyway?'" Michelle had joined the agency as a nurse 2 years earlier and, encouraged by her supervisor, had recently applied for and received the coordinator position. Michelle explains, "I never thought of myself in a leadership role, or really pursued it...becoming a leader was something that just sort of happened to me. Now that I'm in a supervisory position, I find myself enjoying it but feeling totally overwhelmed at times. I'm responsible for so many things! Sometimes I wonder if I've really got what it takes."

Leadership has "just happened" to many of us. We may have had little formal training or education on how to be a leader. This resource was written to help leaders in infant/family programs better understand the impact of their style, skills, and relationships on their effectiveness in the workplace. It discusses the concept of reflective leadership, which differs from other styles of leadership in that it emphasizes the link between effective relationships and quality work. Professionals who may find this publication useful include the diverse group of leaders who are active in infant/family programs including supervisors, coordinators, managers, team leaders, and directors. Both new and experienced professionals can use the ideas and exercises within to understand their leadership roles in a new way.

With your hectic schedule in mind, this workbook was designed so that you can move through it sequentially, from front to back, or select only those modules most useful to you. The material is divided into three sections:

Section One: Defines reflective leadership and explores the parallel process of leadership

Section Two: Outlines the competencies required for effective leadership

Section Three: Provides exercises suitable for individual or group work

SECTION ONE: THE LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE

WHAT IS REFLECTIVE LEADERSHIP?

Sit back for a moment and think about the words or phrases you might use to describe an effective leader and jot them down, if you'd like.

Chances are, the characteristics you have listed are not specific to the infant/family field but encompass more general qualities like "open to new ideas," "thoughtful," "compassionate." The leadership traits listed below were generated by a group of early intervention professionals and are representative of the skills and abilities that most people believe leaders should possess. Did any of these qualities appear on your list?

- Communicates a shared vision
- Is confident
- Exhibits a can-do attitude
- Facilitates and compromises; looks for "win-win" solutions
- Involves staff; uses a team-based approach
- Is flexible, adaptive

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:

How prepared did you feel for your leadership role?

66 LEADERSHIP
TAKES PLACE IN THE
CONTEXT OF RELATION-
SHIPS, AND QUALITY
RELATIONSHIPS ARE
CRUCIAL TO GOOD
OUTCOMES."99

- Listens attentively
- Motivates staff
- Provides support and encouragement
- Respects staff and their thoughts, opinions, and feedback
- Sets clear goals
- Shares achievements
- Trusts employees
- Uses humor

Almost all of the qualities refer to how effective the leader is at managing her interactions with others. Simply put, we lead through relationships. *How we lead is important. How we treat others, how we interact, how we resolve conflict, and how we provide feedback all directly influence our staff members' experience of the work.*

Although effectiveness as a leader is often measured in quantitative outcomes—increasing school readiness, decreasing incidences of abuse and neglect, increasing vaccination rates—it is our ability to reflect on, and optimize, our relationships that makes these goals achievable. It is our skill in connecting with others, guiding and mentoring them, that makes “good numbers” a natural outgrowth of good relationships. In other words, our accomplishments are a reflection of what our relationships have allowed us to achieve. That fundamental truth inspired this publication: Leadership takes place in the context of relationships, and quality relationships are crucial to good outcomes.

REFLECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN INFANT/FAMILY PROGRAMS

Leaders in the infant/family field hope that their program is one in which quality relationships characterized by trust, support, and growth exist among supervisors, staff, parents and children. These relationships form the foundation for all the work that is done. Workplaces based on these beliefs and values can be thought of as relationship-based organizations.

Reflective leadership is the key to creating a relationship-based organization. It is characterized by three important skills: self-awareness, careful observation, and flexible response.

Self-awareness refers to a leader's ability to know herself, her strengths, and her limitations. It implies that a leader is interested in, and committed to, examining her own reactions, thoughts, and feelings about the work.

Careful observation means that leaders are skilled at deciphering the meaning of what they are seeing and hearing. Leaders wonder about the meaning of their own and others' behavior, tones of voice, body language, or reactions. They ask themselves, “Why might this be happening?” and solicit more information.

Flexible responses require that leaders know their staff—what their personal styles are, how they work best, what motivates them. Leaders can then approach each professional in a way that reflects *that particular staff member's* needs, strengths, and areas for development. Flexible responses are the most basic—and sometimes most difficult—expression of mutual respect in our relationships with staff members.

LEADERSHIP AND THE PARALLEL PROCESS

John approached Helen, an early intervention specialist in the department: “Helen, here's the draft of our grant proposal. Could you edit it when you get a chance? I know the last time I gave it to you the same day it was due...I felt bad about that. I really tried to get my act together this time! It's not due for another 3 days so hopefully you won't be as rushed.” Helen smiled. “Thanks, John. I appreciate it. I'm swamped today, but I'll start it first thing tomorrow morning. How does that sound?”



PHOTO CREDIT: NURVE KARSU

Leaders' relationships with staff can serve as a mirror for staff's work with families. *How we are with them*—whether respectful, interested, and nonjudgmental, or suspicious, quick to judge, and uninterested—strongly influences *how they will be with the families they serve*. Staff cannot create with families what they have not experienced themselves. That is to say, when staff feel supported in their work (even when they make mistakes or struggle with difficult situations), the experience of having a safe place to learn is powerful: it gives them a model of how to support families in the same way. This dynamic, in which leader-staff relationships mirror staff-family relationships, is referred to as a parallel process.

As a new leader, you may not have experienced regular supervision, or collaborative supervision, or supervision characterized by trust, openness, and mutual respect. You may be wondering what difference your supervisory style truly makes to the families in your program. In fact, the research says it makes a profound difference—*how you are with staff sets the tone for how staff are with families*.

For example, one study found that in preschool classroom settings, a director's leadership style is strongly related to the style of teaching in the center. When directors approached staff in a warm and flexible manner, teachers typically displayed high levels of encouragement, sensitivity, and creativity in the classroom. However, when the director's style was arbitrary and lacking in warmth, teachers approached classroom management with low levels of encouragement, a high degree of restriction, and an emphasis on rules and restraint (Neugebauer, 1990).

STRESSES IN A NEW LEADERSHIP ROLE
Holly looked up as Marlena, one of the program's

mental health counselors, burst into her office with tears running down her face. "Holly, I need to talk with you. I can't do this anymore. . . ." Holly, on the job for 3 weeks, felt her stomach drop. She looked at Marlena and wondered what on earth to say. Nevertheless, she took a deep breath: "Let's talk."

In this vignette, you may recognize your own experiences as a new leader. Inevitably, one of the biggest changes you face is managing and responding to the many unexpected and emotionally powerful demands on your time. The items below explore other unique stresses that accompany a leadership position in the infant/family field. We have also included some thoughts on responding to, and managing, those stresses.

• Forging a New Identity

There can be a surprising degree of confusion and dislocation after moving into a leadership role. Many leaders feel anxious, "like you've gone out on a limb," observes one program coordinator. You may at first feel overwhelmed by a role that seems unclear, ambiguous, or simply *too much*. This coordinator agrees: "I was just scared at first. It was a good feeling of being scared—excited and anticipatory. But I also felt like a lot of the people that I was managing were older and more experienced in the program than I was. . . I remember thinking, 'Boy, what if I mess this up?'" (personal communication with program leader, April 2001).

There are some major challenges of leadership that you may struggle with across much of your career. For example, as a leader, you are no longer assessed solely on your own performance but on the performance of your staff. This may engender

MANAGING STRESS: DISCOVERING EFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES

Sit down with a colleague or your supervisor and discuss the following questions:

- 1 What is most stressful about this position?
- 2 How have I coped with those stressors thus far?
- 3 What does my response to these stressors tell my staff about how to handle challenges?
- 4 How do my peers handle these stressors?
- 5 How else might I handle these challenges? How can I respond differently or cope more effectively?

¹ Note: Interviewees requested anonymity.

a feeling of "losing control" which can be intimidating. It is common for leaders to over-compensate by taking an I-can-do-it-all attitude, which quickly becomes overwhelming and doesn't allow for professional growth in other staff.

A second stressor comes when staff members make mistakes. There can be a temptation to step in and "save the day" by telling employees how to fix their missteps, or by resolving the issue yourself. You may find yourself needing to define when stepping in is necessary, when it is useful, and when it is unneeded or even harmful. Learning to manage the tendency to jump in and fix things is not easy, especially because many of us were attracted to the field because of our desire to help others. Using reflection as a way to let staff members "see for themselves," while a powerful and positive experience for our staff, can cause feelings of anxiety, fear, or frustration in us at times.

Receiving reflective supervision ourselves, in the context of a trusting, respectful relationship, can help us make sense of the emotions that the leadership role arouses in us. It can also provide us with the support and guidance we need to handle difficult situations appropriately. It can be a challenge for program leaders to find a relationship for reflection and learning. Sometimes it is possible to establish such relationships with a supervisor, with peers, or with another experienced staff member. When talking over issues with peers or staff, it may be necessary to avoid certain private or confidential issues. To learn more about reflective supervision, consult one of the publications on this topic in the reference list (Parlakian, 2001; Norman-Murch, 1999; Bertacchi, 1996; Fenichel, 1992).

A promotion to a leadership position profoundly affects each and every one of your prior workplace relationships. Peers become supervisees, former supervisors or managers become peers. Your own view of yourself and others' views of you can undergo profound changes. Adapting to these shifts, handling your own and others' reactions to them, is a big job. Many new leaders find that it takes them about a year to adjust to all the identity and relationship shifts and changes.

• Understanding Staff's Expectations

Open-ended job responsibilities, along with the pressures of leading a team in an environment of overload, ambiguity, and emotional intensity, may try the strengths of those in leadership positions. Faced with the need for near-constant problem solving, directors begin to feel the pressure of being seen as the "one with all the answers."

Leaders may be shocked by the sheer number of problems they are expected to resolve in a given hour, day, and week. One new coordinator of a child abuse prevention program notes, "I was surprised by the power of others' expectations of me. They expected answers to questions that I didn't know very much about. I kept thinking, 'I don't know anything more today than I knew yesterday.' But their expectations of me changed when I took on the coordinator role" (personal communication with program leader, April 2000).

As a leader, our words and actions carry more weight than we might realize. Staff and families may interpret our behavior to include feelings or beliefs we did not intend. While this is very common, we might not be aware of it, or be prepared for it when it happens to us. Consider the following example:

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:

What are the changes you noticed after taking on a leadership role?

Kristina was the director of the early childhood center. Most days she enjoyed her job, but today she felt overwhelmed by all her responsibilities—like staff management, marketing, and finances. This morning she arrived early at the center, nervous about a 9 a.m. meeting with a potential donor.

Jill, a teacher in the program, passed her in the hallway. "Good morning, Kris. How are you?" Kristina, barely noticing, replied with a quick and rather distracted, "Hello." Jill felt that Kris hadn't been very friendly, and her feelings were hurt. "I wonder if she thinks that I'm not doing very well with my class." Later that day, she took Kris aside. "Since you're not very happy with my work, I really think we should talk." Kris was nonplussed. She thought Jill was doing a great job—where in the world had she gotten this idea?

Though situations like these can be confusing and difficult, it is important to give yourself the time necessary to explore what happened and to address the concerns at hand. While it may be tempting to just move on, it's worth it in the long run to reflect, ask questions, and respond to your staff member's concerns. Here is Kris' response.

K: *Jill, I have to say that I'm really surprised. I am not at all worried about your work. Quite the opposite...I think you're doing a great job!*

J: *It's just that you seemed so annoyed with me this morning. I thought it had to be about my work.*

K: *Oh...oh! We passed in the hall this morning—that's right. Jill, I was on my way to meet with the Byron Foundation and I was really stressed out. They were here to discuss funding the parent mentoring program. I've never had to "sell" a program to a funder before. I was scared to death! I'm sorry...I didn't realize you thought it had anything to do with you.*

J: *Boy, that's a relief. I've been upset all day. I'm glad it was nothing.*

K: *Me, too. What was it that made you think I was upset with you?*

J: *Well, I guess you weren't acting like yourself. Usually you're so upbeat, but today you didn't look very happy. And... well, I guess I've been feeling a little worried about how my teaching is going. Maybe I just put two and two together.*

K: *What have you been worried about?*

J: *I'm having a lot of trouble with Tim and Jeffrey. Nothing works with them—they just fight like cats and dogs all day long. I don't know if I can keep them both in my classroom. I'm spending half my day prying them apart, and I feel like I'm neglecting the other children.*

K: *How about I come in tomorrow morning to observe, and then we talk tomorrow afternoon about what we can do? It sounds like a tough situation.*

J: *That would be great.*

An early intervention coordinator with 20 years' experience in the field observed that, "It's a leader's job to read people and be sensitive to the impact you're making on them. You have to be constantly 'on.' That doesn't mean being cheery all the time, but you need to be tuned in. Every single interaction you have as a leader is important, whether it's with parents, staff, or funders, because you never know what impact your words are going to have" (personal communication with program leader, May 2001).

In the example above, Kris feels, perhaps for the first time, the impact of the authority she now carries. Like many of us in the field, it may take time for her to feel comfortable with it. For women in leadership positions, this dynamic is often intensified, as the expectations that others have for you as a leader—nurturing and supportive on one hand, decisive and results-focused on the other—might seem in conflict at times. When these challenges come up, it is important to seek out a supervisor or trusted colleague. Feelings of isolation only intensify our frustration.

SECTION TWO: THE LEADERSHIP FUNDAMENTALS DOWN TO BASICS: KEY COMPETENCIES FOR REFLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Like babies, adults tend to most easily develop new skills in the context of supportive relationships. The way we see our role, approach problems, and supervise our staff changes as our level of experience and insight changes. Learning how to be a reflective leader is, then, a career-long progression. Across our professional lives, competencies such as self-awareness, careful observation, and flexible response form the building blocks for quality relationships with our staff, and contribute immeasurably to our effectiveness in whatever leadership roles we assume. The following section explores these important leadership skills in more detail.

SELF-AWARENESS:

Developing Knowledge of Self

"There's nothing more I can do," Samantha said, "This mother obviously doesn't care about helping her son with his disability." Toni, Samantha's supervisor, felt herself begin to get angry. She thought, "There's always something you can do! I know we can work with this parent—how can you even think about writing her off?" She took a deep breath and paused before responding. She knew how her temper got away from her at times. "Sam, let's talk for a minute. It sounds like you're at the end of your rope with this family."

Knowing ourselves involves exploring our strengths and vulnerabilities. We need to wonder about, and try to understand the meaning of, our reactions ("I got angry so quickly. Why is that?"), our frustrations ("I really get aggravated with judgmental staff members.") and the parts of our job that bring us joy ("I love it when families graduate from the program."). This exploration can sometimes be difficult or uncomfortable. When we begin to reflect on our feelings, opinions, and reactions, we must think about our whole selves: how we are at work, but also how we are as a member of our profession, larger community, and families.

Reflective supervision—regular meetings in which we discuss what we're feeling and thinking with a supportive and thoughtful partner—is essential to our journey. Reflection gives us the time and space to make better decisions, to appreciate the complexities of the problems we are facing, and to understand the ways in which we influence and affect others. In the example above, Toni might use reflective supervision as a chance to step back and think about her strong reaction to Samantha and, from that, learn more about herself and her leadership style: "Maybe I am being as judgmental of Samantha as she is being of the mother in this family. If I am feeling so strongly, I can imagine how frustrated Samantha feels, even if I don't agree with her."

If you have not had an opportunity to receive regular supervision that is reflective and supportive in nature, there are several things you can do:

- identify a mentor who can provide this ongoing support;
- seek training on supervision;
- read more about supervision;
- discuss these issues with colleagues or peers in your program or the community;
- locate supervisory groups in the community, or create one of your own; or
- contract with a consultant to receive this ongoing support.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:

What are your strengths as a leader?

Self-knowledge is an important part of effective leadership because with it, we begin to recognize patterns in our behavior, emotional reactions, and opinions that we may press on others. We start to wonder why we feel or act a certain way and, in that moment of self-awareness, we are able to see ourselves clearly. This allows us to better manage our emotional responses, better recognize our limitations, and better leverage our skills and strengths.

An important part of self-knowledge is recognizing issues to which we tend to be especially sensitive. Armed with information about our emotional triggers or "hot buttons," we can develop coping skills that help us avoid making snap judgments or reacting in an unproductive

way. When we avoid responses that might be hurtful or otherwise inappropriate, we also avoid damaging the relationships we have worked so hard to build with staff members. This awareness of our own thoughts, feelings, and reactions aids us in empathizing with others and considering how they might be feeling or reacting. It is a critical skill in infant/family work, where the capacity to empathize appropriately with others allows the formation of relationships in which optimal growth and development can occur.

An additional challenge we face as leaders is understanding our reactions, beliefs, and decisions through the lens of culture: our own, our staff's, and those of the families we serve. Remaining aware of how our own life experiences and cultural identity impact our outlook is especially important when we are faced with situations in which there is a discrepancy between our cultural expectations and others'. Observe how culture, personal values, and self-awareness interact in the exercise below. *Sharing the Care.*

Placing a value on knowing ourselves and managing our responses provides a valuable parallel for our staff in their work with parents and children.

Direct service professionals must also engage in inquiry, wondering about their own reactions to, and feelings about, those they serve. Like us, our staff learns best by discovering themselves in the mirror of their relationships with families.

Having had a chance to reflect on our role as a leader and the ways in which it affects us as individuals, we now turn our attention outward to explore how leaders impact their staff and organizations.

Promoting Self-Awareness in Others

Tish, a caregiver at a child care center, sighed as she sat down for a talk with her supervisor, Alisha. "Molly's not doing well with morning drop-off. She just cries and cries. And her mom doesn't seem to know what to do—she usually just sneaks out and that makes Molly cry harder. I'm wondering if I should do something." Alisha nodded, "Like what?" "Well, like help the mom...tell her to wait a few minutes before she runs out." "Hmmm," said Alisha, "I'm wondering if you were Molly's mom, how that might make you feel?" "Well, I'd probably be okay with it." Tish thought for a minute, "But I guess if I was having a bad day, I might feel hurt or a little annoyed. Maybe instead I could ask her if she wanted to stay for a few minutes, that Molly misses her when she leaves without saying good-bye."

SHARING THE CARE: PERSONAL VALUES AND LEADERSHIP

Maria, a team leader for a preschool serving children with developmental delays, had an unusual challenge. One of the parents in the program came from a culture that put a strong emphasis on nurturing small children. For example, this mother always carried her almost-3-year-old, even on the long walk to and from the program. Furthermore, her son had never fed himself—not even finger foods. In accordance with the norms of her culture, his mother had always fed him herself. Entering the program, this parent was concerned that he be cared for in a way that matched his family's culture and values system.

Maria faced a dilemma. First of all, she had limited resources—six teachers for a classroom of 22 kids, each of whom faced specific needs and challenges in participating in the program. Secondly, the boy was tall for his age and heavy. Maria feared staff might not be physically able to hold and carry him as much as his mother wished. Finally, there was part of Maria that felt the child should be walking and eating for himself; after all, in her culture, children were encouraged to walk early and many were toddling before they turned one!

Following are some questions for reflection with a colleague, or to consider on your own:

- 1 What is your initial reaction about the choices this parent has made? Are these choices similar or different from ones you have made, or would make, for your own child?
- 2 What does your reaction say about your beliefs and values concerning child-rearing?
- 3 How would you respond to this parent? Specifically:
 - a. How would you propose to "share the care" with this parent—respecting her culture and her child's needs in the context of your program's operational realities?
 - b. How would you gather more information about the family's needs and background?
 - c. How would you approach her about these issues? What are the values that guide your thoughts about this situation?
 - d. What goals would you have for your next conversation with her?
- 4 Can you think of a time when you made a choice (personal or professional) that made you look different to those around you?
 - a. How did others respond to your choice?
 - b. How did others' responses make you feel?
 - c. What did you go on to do?

“REMAINING
 AWARE OF HOW OUR
 OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES
 AND CULTURAL IDENTITY
 IMPACT OUR OUTLOOK
 IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT
 WHEN WE ARE FACED
 WITH SITUATIONS
 IN WHICH THERE IS
 A DISCREPANCY
 BETWEEN OUR CULTURAL
 EXPECTATIONS AND
 OTHERS’.”



PHOTO CREDIT: LACONIA EHS (LACONIA, NH)

One important way we can engender self-awareness in our staff is to promote reflection as a *professional skill*. By encouraging employees to question the meaning behind their thoughts, feelings, and responses to the work and by discussing these issues during supervision, we support their growing curiosity and ability to wonder. We can use inquiry as a tool to support their capacity for self-reflection and learning, and we can encourage staff to explore their interests and identify areas for growth. By providing staff with new challenges—either through external opportunities or internal reflection—we scaffold their transition to a higher level of skill.

Guiding staff in this way helps us maintain a supportive, connected, and objective stance of mutual discovery and learning. Ultimately, interactions during supervisory sessions are an important learning opportunity for both supervisor and supervisee. Staff's capacity for self-awareness increases, as does supervisors' for empathy and sensitive observation.

in our role as leaders, a key responsibility is to establish a connection with each staff member who reports to us. Only then can we begin to understand and appreciate the unique strengths and areas for development each individual brings to her role. Everyone approaches their work with a combination of things they do especially well, and things they find more difficult. It is often possible for people to develop new capacities in those areas of difficulty, or to develop strategies to work around or compensate for them. An important role for leaders is to model, and to encourage in others, both approaches: striving to build new skills and knowledge, and recognizing when to compensate for an area of lesser ability.

Learning more about our staff members requires that we do three important things—all difficult, and all equally vital:

- rely on our own self-awareness to release our preconceived notions of staff members (what they should like or dislike, what they should aspire to, what areas they should 'want' to develop) in order to truly hear what they're telling us;
- resist the impulse to prescribe training to "fix" a staff member; and
- recognize that each staff member begins from a different starting place.

You will probably find that you build a different relationship with each supervisee—one may be more intense, another may be filled with laughter, still another may be rather serious in tone. Some staff may require more guidance and structure from you; others are very self-motivated. This is *normal*. There are many "right ways" to establish an effective supervisory relationship. In fact, individualizing your relationships with staff and, by extension, your expectations for their growth and development, provides a valuable model for staff's work with families.

Staff supervision is only part of the picture. Our second important responsibility to staff is to encourage their professional growth within their field or discipline. Clearly leaders must find a balance between staff's individual development and the development of staff as a whole. That is, some training opportunities are offered to expand the collective knowledge and skills of the group, while other activities may be unique to a specific employee.

Though ultimately staff development is a self-driven process, leaders can support staff's efforts by working with them to identify activities and experiences that best reflect their interests and career aspirations. Though all employees need to be competent in a range of areas, further skill development will ideally expand on those topics that have special meaning for them as individuals. In short, "Staff members must feel a need for the knowledge or skill you are asking them to learn" (Carter, 1998, p. 256).

How do you individualize staff development? Leaders in the infant/family field use some of the techniques listed below:

- establishing individual "contracts" with staff that outline goals and objectives for the coming year; these targets are jointly identified by staff member and supervisor;
- compiling up-to-date information on staff development opportunities—conferences, lectures, speakers, etc.—from which staff and supervisor select events most tailored to the individual's needs;
- soliciting staff input on training topics;
- making the most of training by establishing individualized learning objectives for each staff member;
- encouraging "shadowing" in which staff members observe peers or others at work;
- utilizing staff meetings as formal or informal training opportunities;
- taking advantage of "teachable moments" that arise in the everyday work as opportunities for learning and growth;
- providing each staff member with a small "growth and development" budget; and
- supporting reading and research in a staff member's area of interest.

We often encourage parents to call on other parents for advice and expertise; we encourage children to share with, and help, one another. The same process can work for program staff. Cultivating learning relationships in the program is one of the most lasting and powerful ways we can facilitate staff growth and development. While some programs achieve this by establishing full-blown mentoring programs, others encourage staff-to-staff learning through a "yellow pages" document that lists the unique skills and abilities of all employees (see below for an example).

Encouraging the creation of peer networks goes a long way toward encouraging continuous learning.

It also contributes to a collaborative culture, one characterized by an appreciation for differences and a mutual respect for one another's work.

Ultimately, promoting self awareness and reflection among staff impacts retention, and directors have reported that staff retention critically affects quality services to families. It is within the context of effective staff/family relationships that very young children and their parents grow and change. Building relationships like these, characterized by trust and respect, takes time and high rates of staff turnover undoubtedly threaten this process. Once hired, careful attention to how staff are supported and supervised can go a long way toward retaining valued employees.

CAREFUL OBSERVATION:

Creating a Supportive Work Environment

"I'm not sure that I feel comfortable with the plans for a Christmas celebration this year. I know that a lot of our staff and families celebrate Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. I want to be sure they feel included. Maybe we could organize a celebration of all three holidays—an opportunity for all of us to learn more about each other?"

A supportive work environment is important because it promotes staff retention and encourages effective relationships with others. One of the most important things our work environment tells us is *how to be with others*. It provides us with information on the organizationally appropriate way to interact, to respond, and to interpret others' overtures.

Thinking About Work Environments

One way to think about a program's work environment is that it is the sum total of the behaviors and beliefs that staff share: a combination of organizational and individual norms, values, and beliefs. It is "how we are" at work. These

Name	Extension	Department	Program Skills	Interpersonal Skills	Individual Skills
Amie	x5246	Early Intervention	Speech language therapy; special expertise with children with hearing loss	• Trained mediator • Experience as a meeting facilitator	Fluent in American Sign Language

values, behaviors, and beliefs are so much a part of the daily course of our work that people often do not recognize them as unique; they simply become the "way we do things here."

Work environments can be adapted and can change to reflect what the leader values. For example, if an organization professes to appreciate teamwork, and supervisors reward those staff who are cooperative and inclusive, the work environment will come to reflect these behaviors. As more staff are promoted from within and fewer hired from "outside," this dynamic becomes increasingly a part of "how we are."

Work environments can vary across an organization. A work group can have its own distinctive "feel," compared to the organization as a whole or to another department. This illustrates the point that leaders have the opportunity to influence their own group's environment significantly.

REFLECTION AND LEADERSHIP

Over time, we all change and grow in the leadership role. Self-reflection invites us to think about the ways in which we're changing, the new skills we're developing, and the new perspective we're gaining through our role. Read the questions below and take some time to jot down your responses. It could be interesting and useful to revisit these questions periodically.

- 1 What does it feel like to be in this role?
- 2 How would I describe my relationship with my supervisor?
- 3 How have my relationships with other staff changed?
- 4 How have others' expectations of me changed?
- 5 How has my own view of myself changed?
- 6 How have I coped with the stresses of leadership?
- 7 What have I learned so far?
- 8 What do I still want to learn about my role and responsibilities?
- 9 What are my greatest strengths in this position?
Areas for development?
- 10 What has been my most challenging decision thus far?

Assessing Work Environment

How do you get started thinking about the work environment in your program? Conducting a *gap analysis*, in which you and a group of staff members compare your current, real organizational beliefs and behaviors with the ideal you hope to achieve, is one strategy. This is a time-intensive process that requires a safe environment and tremendous persistence. It will likely take a series of discussions before you and your work group reach consensus on these issues.

By identifying what gaps exist between the real and the ideal, leaders can decide what, if any, changes they'd like to make. The following questions provide an example of how to evaluate an organization's focus on relationship-based work.

Think of the behaviors that would define relationship-based work (see *Characteristics of Relationship-Based Organizations* in the sidebar on page 11 for examples). With that in mind, answer the questions below for your *ideal* work environment:

Organizational Climate: How the Work is Done

- What are the organization's beliefs about the work?
- How are employees' contributions recognized?
- How is employee feedback solicited?
- What behaviors and values do the human resources policies (e.g., employee selection, promotion, compensation) reward and reinforce?
- How is the culture of the surrounding community reflected in staff?
- What would a job candidate be told are the program's strengths?

Interpersonal Issues: How Do Staff Interact

- How do employees treat one another?

- How is conflict resolved?
- What is the relationship like between staff and families in care?
- Who do staff members turn to when they feel upset, overloaded, or burnt out?
- What is the role of the supervisor?
- How frequently do staff members and supervisors sit down to talk about the work?

- ➡ Answer the same questions for your current work environment.
- ➡ Identify areas of overlap and/or disagreement.

After examining these questions, convene a representative group of staff to discuss what, if any, next steps

are appropriate. Does your current work environment overlap completely with your ideal? If not, in what areas do you see the biggest gaps? If gaps do exist, what are your options for next steps? Before initiating any changes, reflect on these questions:

- Have you truly collaborated with staff in the assessment process?
- Do you know the organization well enough to make changes at this point in time?
- What relationships are crucial to a successful change effort? Have you established these relationships?

When reviewing the results of assessments like these, you may observe preferred behaviors and

CHARACTERISTICS OF RELATIONSHIP-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Characteristic	Examples of Behaviors
Mutual and shared goals— Collaborative work	• Asking all staff to participate in staff meeting discussions • Asking staff and supervisors to work together in specific ways (e.g., designing a training, delivering services to a family, etc.)
Commitment to growth and change— Learning from experience and questioning the status quo	• Using information from program evaluations to change the way staff provide services • Seeking suggestions for program improvements from all levels of staff
Commitment to reflecting on one's work— Using supervision to encourage learning from experience	• Providing every staff member with a regular, scheduled time to meet with a supervisor to look at, and learn from, the work
Respect for individuals— Acceptance of individuals for both their strengths and vulnerabilities; trust and esteem exists between colleagues	• Recruiting staff to create a team that reflects the diversity of the community and the population served
Sensitivity to context— Acknowledging that environ- ments influence the individuals within them, and vice versa	• Addressing the impact of violence in the community on staff and on the families they serve
Open communication— Valuing others' thoughts, ideas, and feedback	• Tolerating a diversity of values and beliefs • Soliciting staff's thoughts and ideas about the program • Accepting differences of opinion; training staff in how to manage conflict effectively
Setting standards for staff— Establishing accepted definitions of professional excellence	• Ensuring that the ethical standards that guide staff are clearly articulated and used in supervising the work

Adapted from Bertacchi, 1996.²

² Sources of more information on relationship-based organizations are listed in the bibliography.



66 ACKNOWLEDGING

THAT THE ACTIONS
OF AN INDIVIDUAL
STAFF MEMBER CAN
BE AN INDICATOR
OF THE ORGANIZA-
TION'S HEALTH IS A
POWERFUL, THOUGH
DAUNTING, SHIFT
IN THINKING. 99

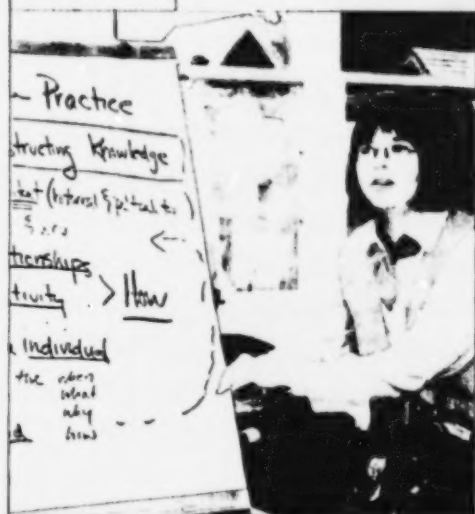


PHOTO CREDIT: LACONIA EHS (LACONIA, NH)

beliefs—or attitudes that the organization believes *should* be true, even when they are not. For example, if an organization values cross-cultural expertise, but none of its staff speak Spanish (the home language of the families served), then this is probably a preferred belief. Being able to see these disparities is a crucial skill for leaders, as accepting preferred beliefs and behaviors as the “real thing” can lull us into complacency and damage the integrity of the work environment we are attempting to build.

It is also easy to forget that our organizations and their surrounding social and cultural environments are living things—they change with time and experience. This makes it even more important to revisit the beliefs and behaviors that define our organizations on a regular basis (annually is ideal).

Thinking Systemically

“Deborah, I’m heading out to a City transportation committee meeting. I’ll be back around 4.” “Why on earth are you going there?” “They’re doing a review of the city bus routes. I’m going to speak on how we need more routes that stop near the center. Right now, the 42 and the 26 are the only ones that do. It makes it hard for families to get here.”

Thinking systemically means integrating knowledge about the external world into the way that the program is run. Often this takes the form of building relationships with community leaders, potential funders, government representatives, and the media. Systemic thinking also means turning the mirror inward, and being aware of the way internal forces and factors can affect an entire organization. Acknowledging that the actions of an individual staff member can be an indicator of the organization’s health is a powerful, though daunting, shift in thinking. See the sidebar on page 13 for a more in-depth example of this dynamic.

The ability to think across, and outside, the organization evolves with experience. Early in your career, thinking systemically might mean clipping an article for the executive director on a new source of funding. Later in your career, you may respond by contacting the funder directly, or by organizing a meeting of local funders to discuss services, outcomes, and additional needs in your region.

Think for a moment about the internal and external factors acting on your organization. Consider whether these systems have an impact at the:

- day-to-day operational level; and/or
- long-term, strategic level.

Common factors that impact infant/family programs include those listed below.

Government Factors

- Federal government and Federal departments’ activities and priorities
- Presidential administration and party affiliation; party of Congressional majority
- Local political system

Community Factors

- Community challenges, like crime levels
- Cultures/diversity of community
- Economic climate in the community/region
- Employment environment in the community/region

System Factors

- Health care systems, such as Medicaid
- Mass media systems
- School system
- Transportation system

Individual Factors

- Professional field (e.g., mental health, early childhood, early intervention, etc.)
- Religious/cultural affiliations of staff/families

There is no doubt that managing a set of relationships with outside organizations enriches our work and creates opportunities for more comprehensive services to families. It also confronts us with the need to manage a complex (and sometimes challenging) web of interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships. Shifting our perspective from day-to-day operations to external relationship management takes both time and experience. Thinking systemically means seeing our relationships with the community as a parallel to our relationships with staff—they both take time to build, and require trust, mutual respect, and open communication to be successful.

The sidebar exercise on page 14 provides a case example for evaluating the impact of internal and external relationships on program quality and effectiveness.

FLEXIBLE RESPONSE:

Encouraging Collegiality

The agency director rang Toby, a mental health counselor in the program: "Toby, the state's early childhood

conference is coming up in September. I was wondering if you'd be available to present on the curriculum we use with kids who have autism. You're a fantastic speaker, and I think this would be a great opportunity for you to get some recognition."

Leadership requires at least two people, one in the leader role and one in the follower role. When we think about our many responsibilities as leaders, it is easy to forget the role we play in encouraging collaborative work between those who are following and those in leadership roles. Collegiality, a respect for the contribution of both leader and follower, is given short shrift in our culture. The media spotlights the glamour and power of the leader, and gives little attention to the importance of effective followers. In the face of these images, it's easy to forget that we are all both leaders and followers depending on the situation.

In an organization where leadership and followership are equally valued, followers are not clones of the leader, but complements. The leader and followers achieve together what they could not accomplish alone. Their relationship is a partnership characterized by mutual respect, trust, and shared knowledge. A free flow of information between them contributes to informed decision making, individualized responses to challenging situations, and quality services to families.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS; ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

Paula was the site supervisor at a migrant family services center whose funding agency initiated a reorganization to improve efficiency and reduce costs. The plan was to consolidate the number of sites from 5 to 3 centers across the region. As one of the site supervisors, Paula was responsible for operationalizing these changes, which included integrating her own staff of 15 with 10 additional employees from a neighboring center.

Though these changes were almost universally unpopular (Paula herself thought the decision was a mistake), she notes, "I resolved to make it work. I'm not one to sugarcoat things, and I knew it would be hard, but I also knew it could be done. I realized, though, that I needed to involve my staff. So all of the information I got, they got. We had team meetings, department meetings, one-on-one meetings—all discussing what the change meant for us as an organization and how we were going to make it work. Their input really helped to ensure that the reorganization came off as smoothly as it possibly could. Staying in close contact also meant that I could

address their concerns right away, rather than let things boil under the surface." Paula also encouraged staff to discuss the upcoming changes with families.

A year after the transition, Paula's team had the lowest turnover of all three sites. Her employee satisfaction rates, based on an all-agency survey, were also near the top. When one of her staff members was asked about the change a year later, he noted, "It was definitely hard, but we really felt like we were part of it, helping to build something new. It's worked out well."

- In this example, how did Paula's individual actions affect organizational functioning?
- What does this example tell us about the supervisory role?
- Think about a time when you observed the power of an individual's impact (positive or negative) on an organization. What about this individual's actions made them so far-reaching?
- How do your own behaviors or beliefs affect your program's work environment?

To create an environment of respectful give-and-take, it is crucial to communicate to staff that disagreement is not only acceptable, but natural and often helpful. By encouraging a range of opinions from staff (and expressing them oneself), leaders can show that they value differences and support inclusive decision-making. By responding respectfully to those who speak, leaders model how to react openly and flexibly. Finally, by ensuring the group environment is a safe and trusting one, leaders help forge relationships with, and among, followers.

Collegiality doesn't just happen. It requires that, as leaders, we acknowledge our limits, accept help from our staff, and recognize their unique talents and contributions. This can be intimidating at times. Watching a staff member do something as well—or better—than us may tap into our own insecurities about our talents and abilities. At some level, we may ask ourselves, "Shouldn't I be the expert in everything? Isn't that what makes me a leader?" The truth is that none of us has all the answers, and also that having all the answers isn't necessary.

Be a "good-enough" leader. Know your strengths, but also know your limits. And know your staff. Find in them the skills that complement your own, and allow them to use these skills. Nurture their unique talents, and learn to manage—and overcome—any fear or defensiveness you might feel in the face of their competence (reflective supervision can be especially helpful in these situations). As one nurse specializing in early intervention services puts it, "One of the things I figured out after a while (and it did take a long time) was that when you're a leader, you need to surround yourself with people who make up for your own limitations." When leaders provide direction, guidance, and mentoring, followers are able to make their own important contribution to the work.

CASE STUDY: MONROE COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM'S EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

Monroe County's early childhood program (MCECP) for preschoolers (ages 3 to 5, and their parents) who are developmentally at-risk had enrolled approximately 500 eligible families in past years. This put the program at full capacity. Enrollment was advertised at local family service agencies as well as through a direct mail campaign to eligible families. Services then and now include a developmentally appropriate preschool, support for parents such as parenting classes, and monthly home visits designed to help parents relate better to their children.

Enrollment had been dropping steadily, but not drastically, over the last 5 years. This year, however, enrollment of new children dropped sharply to 200. With the program at less than half of capacity, the program director is now wondering what to do.

One major change has occurred in the community over the last 10 years. The demographic make-up of the community has slowly shifted and, where previously minority groups were represented by a sizable African-American community and a number of Spanish-speaking families, Monroe County is now 40% Asian-American. The MCECP employs several staff members who are fluent Spanish-speakers, and one individual who speaks Korean. The center's preschool has toys and

games labeled in Spanish, as well as activities (songs and games) from Spanish-speaking cultures. Neither the director nor the staff is very familiar with the cultures of Asia, although their community's families are mainly from Korea, Viet Nam, Japan, China, India, and Pakistan.

What would you do if you were the program director?

- 1 What are your biggest challenges?
- 2 What relationships would you seek to build?
- 3 What are the short-term (immediate) next steps you would suggest?
- 4 What are the medium-term (6-12 months) next steps you would suggest?
- 5 What are the long-term (12 months and beyond) next steps you would suggest?
- 6 As a program leader, what information do you feel you still need? How would you go about soliciting this additional information?

Learning from Conflict

"So, Emmett will be starting in your classroom next month. You know how severe his peanut allergy is—well, his family would like you to be trained in giving his epinephrine shot just in case. Would you be open to that?" Teena looked at her supervisor: "Well, the truth is that I don't know how I feel about that. You know I'm not a trained medical professional. I really don't feel comfortable with the idea of having Emmett's life in my hands if I give the shot wrong."

Encouraging staff members to contribute their own thoughts, expertise, and experience enriches the collective knowledge of the group. An environment that encourages both individualism and collegial effort benefits from the best thinking of both the individual and the group. This ongoing organizational dialogue is an important tool for leaders to use in navigating the challenges and complexities posed by the infant/family field.

Open communication with, and among, staff is a vital component in building a collegial work environment. Sometimes, it is tough, however, to truly listen—especially when our staff members are sharing a message that arouses intense emotions (anger, embarrassment, defensiveness) in us. Building an open relationship with staff, in which we seek their thoughts and opinions, virtually guarantees that there will sometimes be disagreement. In the example above, the program leader, together with Teena, might:

- validate that the situation is serious;
- empathize with the feelings it arouses in Teena;
- brainstorm possible solutions (e.g., hire a medical aide for a few weeks until Teena is fully trained and comfortable administering the shot, train several staff members in administering the shot, consider moving Emmett to another classroom, etc.); and
- discuss other supports that might help with implementing the agreed-upon solution (e.g., institute a "no peanut products" rule program-wide for Emmett's protection).

Can you think of additional options for handling this situation?

Effective leadership includes honoring this respectful dissent, or conflict that has its roots in a sincere desire for dialogue and true concern for the program. The challenges arising from conflict provide us with a unique opportunity to experience the parallel process. In our responses, we model for staff how to disagree respectfully,

how to respond to those with differing opinions, and how to resolve differences equitably. In the process of considering differing ideas and opinions, all involved may gain in understanding and knowledge.

When we allow our staff to experience an open relationship—even when the messages shared are difficult ones—we make it easier for them to do the same with the families in their care. The ability to discuss challenging topics, disagree productively, and resolve conflict are some of the most important and fundamental skills for staff in direct service roles. Learning, practicing, and applying these skills starts with us and our relationships with staff.

In a group, leaders can encourage a dialogue and a diversity of perspectives by inviting staff to share their thoughts and reactions. Sometimes this means remembering to call upon the person who has not yet contributed his or her ideas. Responding to staff feedback in a way that is appropriate to both the individual and the issue at hand is important—and no two situations are the same. Listed below are some guidelines to assist us in responding flexibly.

- *Take the time to stop and explore difficult issues raised in the group, rather than rushing on to the next agenda item.*
- *Clarify individuals' thoughts and opinions; inaccurate assumptions can needlessly intensify the interaction.*
- *Assume the best of others; attribute positive motives to others' reactions and responses.*
- *Wonder about what might really be the issue; sometimes what seems to be the issue isn't. Leaders consider what might be happening beneath the surface.*
- *Respond in a way that respects the individual; it is important to honor individuals' contributions (though this doesn't mean we always are in agreement).*

Learn to take a moment before reacting. Consider what you know about the situation and the individuals involved (even if for only 30 seconds). Think of some questions you might be able to ask in order to increase your understanding of the others' points of view. Take these extra moments to choose the most appropriate response. When we are able to clearly articulate our own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values *without insisting that others feel, think, or believe as we do*, we are honoring respectful dissent.

If you really feel as though you can't reply in a productive way, it is perfectly acceptable to simply take a deep breath and say, "You've raised an important point. To be honest, I'm not sure how to respond at the moment. I'd like to really think about this and get back to you." Then, later, in a less-heated moment you can think about the context of the disagreement, the players involved, the questions to investigate, your own emotions, and the range of possible solutions.

In the vignettes below, two program leaders, Marc and Jacey, are dealing with a similar situation: a staff member whose work seems to be slipping. While reading these dialogues, consider this comment from an early intervention project coordinator: "Relationships are key. When I look back at the times when things didn't go well, it was almost always because the relationship was strained. And, on the other hand, good relationships can help pave the way even when you have 'bad' news to share" (personal communication with a program leader, May 2001).

MARC'S CONVERSATION WITH LAURA

- M:** Laura, I wanted to talk with you about how things are going.
L: Sure, things are going fine.
M: Well, you've seemed a little distracted this past month or so.
L: You're right... I've been really preoccupied. My mother's been ill. I've spent every free minute—before and after work, lunch breaks, you name it—up at the hospital. I hope that's not a problem.
M: No, of course not.
L: Oh, good. (long pause) Well...if there's nothing else....
M: No...nothing else. I'm glad we talked.

WHAT MARC IS THINKING AND FEELING

- M:** What I really want to talk about are the complaints I've been getting from families about your work. (**Angry and frustrated**)
M: For example, forgetting appointments with parents—two just yesterday! (**Judgmental, punitive**)
M: Of course it's a problem! How can I make sure your families are being served appropriately? (**Rejecting, worried**)
M: But we didn't talk about any of the things I need to know to resolve this situation... (**Out of control**)

The following is Jacey's conversation with Sean. What differences do you see?

JACEY'S CONVERSATION WITH SEAN

- J:** Sean, do you have a moment? Something's come up that I'd like to talk over with you.
S: Sure, what is it?
J: Well, I've received two calls from parents this week—one from Sara Brightman and one from the Callahans. They were surprised because you didn't arrive for their appointments yesterday. Of course, they were upset, but also concerned about you. I was, too.
S: Jacey, I am so sorry. I completely forgot about those appointments... they were yesterday afternoon, right? You know that my mother's been ill—well, she's actually gotten a lot worse over the last few days. I've spent every spare minute at the hospital. Then yesterday the nurse called to say her test results were back. I just flew out of here, and I completely forgot to call and cancel my appointments.
J: Sounds like it's been a tough week. How is your mom doing now?
S: Actually, she stabilized overnight, so she's doing much better. The doctors think she'll be fine.
J: I'm glad to hear that.
S: Jacey, I really am sorry about yesterday afternoon. I can't believe I forgot to call and cancel...

WHAT JACEY IS THINKING AND FEELING

- J:** Sean hasn't been himself. (**Worried, concerned**)
J: It is so unlike Sean to miss an appointment. I wonder what could have happened... (**Caring, surprised**)
J: I remember how difficult it was balancing work and everything else when my mother was sick last winter. (**Empathic, understanding, warm**)

JACEY'S CONVERSATION WITH SEAN

WHAT JACEY IS THINKING AND FEELING

J: I understand—but we do need to make sure that we keep our commitments to families. I know that the Brightmans and the Callahans are both feeling a little lost at the moment. How are you thinking of responding?

S: I'd like to give them a call today to apologize and to explain what was going on. And I'll definitely reschedule with them for next week.

J: That sounds like a good idea. Would you also like to transfer some families from your caseload over to Angie's? I think your work with them has been top-notch, but it sounds like you have a lot going on right now. I'm trying to think of a way that we can support you, but also be sure that our families are receiving services.

S: I appreciate the offer, Jacey, but I think I'll be okay next week. It's good to know that's an option if I need it, though. Thank you.

J: No problem. Sean, when things have calmed down, I'd like to talk with you more about how you can begin to recognize when you're feeling overwhelmed. Maybe then we can plan together so that these kinds of things won't happen.

J: Even though it was unintentional, Sean's actions did have consequences. How do I help him find the right response? (Responsible, supportive)

J: Maybe we could support Sean by reducing his caseload? (In charge, in control)

J: I need to maintain high standards while supporting Sean; this means thinking about ways to avoid a re-occurrence. (Responsible)

Taking Different Paths to the Same Goal

At different times in our personal and professional lives, we have all experienced the urge to tell others what to do. Often this urge has a great deal to do with our own worries and fears. When we feel out of control, we may have a desire to "help" others. It may seem that we want to take care of a problem for them, when often it is a misplaced effort to take care of ourselves. Other times, this urge to help comes from a desire to be efficient and help others avoid a time-consuming struggle. In a leadership role, the urge to micromanage is a daily challenge, and one that prevents us from recognizing that there is more than one way to achieve the same goal. Developing the ability to be flexible in response to staff members' skills and interests means, more than anything else, allowing them to find their own solutions. This approach involves staying connected and available, while allowing staff to work toward the goals you and they have identified.

We can support this "path-finding" ability by encouraging reflection. In one-on-one supervision, we may use questions or observations to help team members identify an appropriate response. On an operational level, we can encourage reflection by letting staff know our expectations (e.g., all home visitors must complete at least 10 home visits per week) and then allowing each professional to strategize how best to achieve that goal. It's likely that each will work toward this objective in a different way, for example:

- One may decide to put aside 3 days per week to do home visits
- One may decide to work two evenings per week and adjust her schedule accordingly
- One may make reminder calls the day before scheduled visits to increase her completed visit rate

MARC AND JACEY: QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

- 1 Think about how Marc and Jacey's leadership styles differ. Which is more effective? Why?
- 2 The situation outlined here had the potential for conflict—how did Marc and Jacey handle this?
- 3 What role did open expression of thoughts and feelings have in the success (or failure) of these discussions?
- 4 How would you describe the relationship that Marc and Jacey have with their staff? What type of parallel does their relationship imply for the families that Laura and Sean work with?
- 5 Can you think of a time when, like Marc, you were not successful in conveying (or receiving) important information? Looking back, how might you have handled this situation differently?

What is crucial for staff is that, after an appropriate solution has been identified, we as leaders do all we can to support each professional's individual strategy. Our backing lets staff know that we believe in their ability to think critically and capably. Also, putting decisions about *how* to do the work in the hands of those *doing* the work means that the strategies staff develop will undoubtedly reflect their own preferences, contributing to job satisfaction across the board. Equally critical is encouraging staff members to share information about their experiences, useful strategies they've developed, and lessons learned. Encouraging information dissemination allows learning to be shared and implemented across the program. Often this type of exchange fits nicely into weekly staff meetings, as it is both an efficient way to communicate to the group as well as a good way to recognize employees' problem-solving skills.



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There will inevitably be times when we feel uncomfortable with choices a staff member has made. In those situations, it is important to stop and think about our reaction. Resist the urge to sweep misgivings under the rug or, worse yet, act on them right away. Discuss your thoughts and feelings about the situation with your supervisor or mentor, and ask yourself: Is this particular choice difficult for me simply because it's not one I would have made, or for another reason? Such discomfort might arise for a variety of reality-based reasons. While it is important to empower staff, it is equally important for us to set and maintain high standards for all employees.

Reflection gives us the space we need to understand our own responses in a larger context. It is the tool that allows us to truly individualize our relationships with staff, to empower them to chart their own paths, and to find their own unique and powerful answers.

IN SUMMARY

This resource asks you to think about *how you are* as a leader—how you approach staff, how you share responsibility and collaborate with others, how you use yourself in the work you do. It is more difficult to think about leadership this way. It reminds us of the power we possess to set the tone for our organization and influence the staff and families within it. Thinking of leadership as a function of our values, beliefs, and reactions can also be intimidating because we know we're not perfect

and, thus, bound to make mistakes.

That's okay. With reflective leadership there will be both successes and missteps—some large, some small—along the way. Self-awareness helps us understand our own reactions and feelings more clearly, careful observation gives us the information we need to learn from these situations, and flexible responses ensure that our interactions with others are respectful, open, and effective. Over time, we learn that reflective leadership is not a tool or a technique, but a way of being—for us, our staff, and the families we serve.

SECTION THREE: LEADERSHIP TOOLS AND EXERCISES

GETTING TO KNOW YOU: STAFF DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Think about the staff member(s) who now report(s) to you. Some you might know quite well, while others you may not be very close to. The questions below can provide a starting point to help you get to know the staff members in your program. You may ask staff to

complete these questions and then discuss them in a supervisory meeting, or you may choose to ask them in a face-to-face dialogue. Either way, the objective is the same—taking the first step toward a more productive supervisory relationship.

Staff Member's Name: _____

1 How did you become interested in infant-family issues? _____

2 When did you start with the program? What positions have you held with this program? _____

3 Where did you work before? _____

4 What is your educational background? _____

5 How long have you been in your current position? _____

6 What are the best things about your job? What are the things you like the least about your job? _____

7 What do you find really motivating about working here? _____

8 What would you change about your job if you could? The organization? _____

9 What are your long-term goals? What would you like to be doing 5 years from now? _____

10 What do you think you are learning on the job right now? What are you struggling with at the moment? _____

11 What skills or abilities would you like to develop? _____

LEADERSHIP SELF-ASSESSMENT: IS MY SUPERVISORY STYLE REFLECTIVE?

Instructions: Rate yourself on a scale of 1 (**Rarely**), 2 (**Sometimes**) or 3 (**Almost Always**) on the following statements.

1 In a discussion, I can see areas of agreement among differing opinions.	1	2	3
2 I lead by example, not just by words.	1	2	3
3 I notice good work and I give staff positive feedback.	1	2	3
4 I recognize the value of humor in the workplace.	1	2	3
5 I have a vision of where the agency/center/project I lead is going, and can communicate it to others.	1	2	3
6 When something is not going right for one of my staff members, I take the time to help them think it through and develop an approach to solving it.	1	2	3
7 I am comfortable telling others when I don't know the answer to a particular question.	1	2	3
8 I make sure we celebrate as a team when we meet milestones.	1	2	3
9 I have ways of handling the pressures of my position that allow me to think and strategize even in the midst of crisis.	1	2	3
10 I focus the work of the agency/center/project I lead around the children and families we serve.	1	2	3
11 I make sure people know that it is safe to share their opinions and to say what they really think and feel.	1	2	3
12 I encourage people to let me know what they need in order to work well and, whenever possible, ensure that they get it.	1	2	3
13 I gather input from others and involve staff in decision-making.	1	2	3
14 I devolve decision-making whenever appropriate.	1	2	3
15 I make opportunities to stay current about issues in the field.	1	2	3
16 I think before I act.	1	2	3
17 I meet regularly with the staff who report to me.	1	2	3
18 I solicit feedback from my staff about my own performance.	1	2	3
19 I have a mentor or supervisor in the organization.	1	2	3

**LEADERSHIP
SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS:
IS MY SUPERVISORY STYLE
REFLECTIVE?**

Were your responses mostly:

Ones? Reflective supervision may be new to you or your organization. You may feel unsure or uncomfortable about using these practices with staff. Consider attending an external training session on reflective supervision and relationship-based organizations, or request that your organization run an internal refresher. You also may wish to do some independent reading on reflective supervision; consult the bibliography in Appendix 4 for some ideas. Finally, seek out a mentor with whom you can work to build these skills. Together, viewing some of your (videotaped) supervisory sessions may be helpful in identifying your strengths and developmental areas.

Twos? Reflective supervision is not entirely new to you, however, you may be hesitant in fully implementing its practice. Based on the areas you have marked as "ones," work with your supervisor or mentor to identify activities or experiences that will help you develop these skills and use them with confidence. Consider learning more about the theory of reflection supervision and relationship-based work in order to inform your practice; consult the bibliography on page 22 for some ideas. Attending an external conference on the subject may also prove useful.

Threes? You are comfortable using reflective supervision with your staff and have integrated many facets of this approach into your daily work. How can you expand your knowledge and continue growing? What are your developmental areas or personal goals? Discuss with your mentor or supervisor what your next performance milestones might be. Is it identifying better stress management techniques? Developing your own training session or conference presentation on reflective supervision? Mentoring a challenging staff member? Develop a performance plan that will continue to engage and excite you, while supplementing your work experience with external conferences and classes.

A Suggestion for Using This Self-Assessment:
Consider asking staff members to provide you with feedback on your leadership style by completing this assessment as well.

It might be wise to hire an external consultant or ask a neutral third-party to aggregate the infor-

mation and help you interpret it. Sometimes receiving feedback like this can feel overwhelming and it is useful to have another's perspective and guidance in making sense of it. Looking forward, it is also important to identify a development plan that reflects the comments you received.

An excellent resource for all program leaders and supervisors is ZERO TO THREE and its Center for Program Excellence (www.zerotothree.org/cpe) which provide nationwide training and technical assistance as well as resources, periodicals, and publications on these topics. Contact information provided up front.

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WEBSITES UTILIZED FOR THIS PUBLICATION

Culture

www.hcgnet.com/html/articles/changingCulture.html
www.engin.umd.umich.edu/CIS/strat.plan/goal.htm
www.engin.umd.umich.edu/CIS/strat.plan/over.htm
www.engin.umd.umich.edu/CIS/strat.plan/vision.htm
www.lspublishing.com/LLSPActionPrompt2.html

Followership

www.graphicarts.org/nalc/articles/follower.htm
www.caphq.gov/nhq/aerod/ACSC_Prof_Dev_Modules/CAP/cap_lesson_02/lesson2
www.aacc.af.mil/accnews/sep00/000306.html
www.sba.oakland.edu/isps/html/berg.html

Leadership

www.leadership-development.com/c-culture.html
www.teamdynamics.org/workplac.htm
www.thepeggroup.com/capaper.html

Values

www.nlpu.com/organv.htm
<http://consulting.about.com/careers/consulting/library/weekly/aa080400.htm>

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Help us ensure that future publications reflect your needs and interests.

When you have completed the survey, please copy it and return to (fax) 202-638-0851 or mail to ZERO TO THREE at the address below.

	STRONGLY AGREE				STRONGLY DISAGREE
1 I learned something new in this publication.	1	2	3	4	5
2 This publication was clearly written and easy to understand.	1	2	3	4	5
3 The ideas introduced here were applicable to my work.	1	2	3	4	5
4 The information was organized in a helpful, user-friendly manner.	1	2	3	4	5
5 This publication effectively addressed the importance of relationships in infant/toddler family work.	1	2	3	4	5
6 I used this resource to reflect on the work I am doing.	1	2	3	4	5
7 I have (or plan to) use some of the ideas presented here in my work with families.	1	2	3	4	5
8 I would recommend this publication to colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
9 I will refer to this publication more than once.	1	2	3	4	5
10 Did you or will you use these materials for self-study or for group training?	☐ Self ☐ Group ☐ Both				
11 What is your current level of education?	☐ High School ☐ Some college ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Some graduate school ☐ Master's ☐ Ph.D.				
12 Is your field (check all that apply):	☐ Child care; ☐ Child welfare; ☐ Early intervention; ☐ Family support; ☐ Health; ☐ Home visiting; ☐ Mental Health; ☐ Social services; ☐ Other: _____				
13 Do you currently lead a program?	☐ Yes ☐ No				
14 Do you currently supervise staff?	☐ Yes ☐ No				
15 If applicable, how many years have you been in a management/supervisory role?	_____ years				
16 What other topics would be of interest to you in future publications?	_____				

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

If you are a program leader and would like a free consultation with CPE staff, please call us at 202-638-1144 or e-mail us at cpe@zerotothree.org.

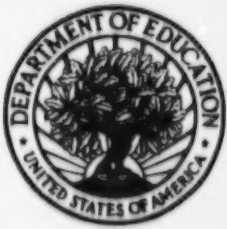
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